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French—the letters in the incised old Lombardic character—as follows:—

✠ HELEYNE LA FEMME WILIAM DE ARMAYL GIT ICI DEU DE SA ALME  
EIT ME'.

This tomb, now placed in the church-yard, appeared to belong to the latter part of the thirteenth century. Who William de Armayl was, Mr. Prim said he was not at present able to say. He had not met with the name in connexion with Kilkenny in the olden time.

The following papers were submitted to the Meeting:—

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#### IRISH MEDICAL SUPERSTITION.

BY THE LATE JOHN WINDELE, ESQ.

A HIGHLY interesting series of papers illustrative of the still existing vestiges of the ancient Paganism of Ireland might be written even now, notwithstanding the many changes from various causes which have been effected amongst us within the last quarter of a century. We have ample material in our old literature and the abundant current folk-lore of the country. It is now, doubtless, too late to disinter from such deposits the whole system of the Irish Pantheon, but a sufficiency remains accessible to elucidate a very considerable portion of it. We know that the progress of Christian conversion was by no means so general or so rapid as many would suppose. There reigned Pagan kings in Ireland subsequent to the alleged establishment of the new faith by St. Patrick; and even so late as the eleventh century we have evidence of the prevalence of the old religion in the remoter districts, and in many of the islands on our western coasts. The public worship of Heathen deities no doubt had ceased amongst the mass of the population, but many privately practised it with a tenacity worthy of a better cause. It is singular that, whilst the memory of the *Dii magni* appears to have died out in the lapse of ages, the full belief in the minor powers—the *Dii minores*—firmly maintained its hold despite every effort to eradicate it. Reason and the immense authority of the Church have in vain opposed this baneful error. The popular mind has sought to reconcile this creed with the doctrine of fallen angels, and thus to harmonize it with Christianity. The baffled missionary had tacitly to abandon the contest; and where he found ancient sites and monuments of the old faith still drawing upon the popular veneration, had to yield to it, and, by adoption and reconsecration for

Christian uses, rest content with little more than a partial conversion. Hence the number of sacred localities still resorted to, such as lakes—the imagined abode of mythical serpents, holy wells, and other places of ancient pilgrimage and devotion. Many of the secondary doctrines of Druidism hold their ground at this very day as articles of faith, assumed to be grafted upon *quasi* Christian opinions: fatalism, and a belief in the metempsychosis, will be found concurrently with a superstitious veneration of the elements of fire and water. The celebration of the annually recurring festivals of the May-day and St. John's fires—the former under its original name of Baaltinne, the fire of Baal—are too well known to need further remark; and the “patrons” and pilgrimages held at sacred lakes and holy wells are equally notorious. Connected with these practices is the vivid memory still retained of once universal *ophiu-latria*, or serpent worship; and the attribution of supernatural powers and virtues to particular animals, such as the bull, the white and red cow (*Bo finne* and *Bo ruadh*), the boar, the horse, the dog, &c., the memory of which has been perpetuated in our topographical denominations. These animals are well known to have been objects of worship in the earliest times amongst nations far removed from each other.

The belief in the existence and attributes of the *sidh*, fairies or good people, answering to the *eumenides* of the Greeks, is as strong at this day in town and country as it was twelve centuries back. These constituted the *Dii minores* of the ancient Celts. The *ban-shee*, the *phuca*, the *lianán*, the *fetch*, and the *cluricaun*, have not lost any of their old potency. Credulity in their regard is excused or palliated by professing Christians on the ground that these beings are the fallen angels of Scripture. For a full elucidation of the whole system of Irish fairy mythology, the curious inquirer may be referred to the popular pages of Griffin, Carleton, and, above all, to the pleasant “*Legends*” of Crofton Creker.

A plentiful and rank crop of other superstitions, the bequest of pre-Christian ages, forming the popular creed of our peasantry, with all the various accessories of witchery and enchantments, attest the unaltered permanence and dominancy of ancient error, and the general credulity.

Druidism was an artfully contrived system of elaborate fraud and imposture—effective to act upon the fears, the feelings, and grosser passions of an ignorant and sensual people. Its priesthood were a compound of the juggler, the knavish hypocrite, and imposter. What scanty knowledge belonged to their period they monopolized, and succeeded by their pretensions to engross to themselves all the power, influence, and emoluments of the state. To them was intrusted the charge of religion, jurisprudence, and medicine,

the professions of which belonged to them exclusively. By pious frauds, as well as by superior intelligence, the result of long and profound study, they acquired and maintained an influence and authority, unquestioned and undisputed. To astonish and excite the awe and the wonder of their adherents was a part of their policy. They certainly well studied the book of nature, were acquainted with the marvels of natural magic, the properties of plants and herbs, and what of astronomy was then known ; they may even have been skilled in mesmerism and biology, and in the work of deception have turned their knowledge to useful account, enhancing thereby their reputation for the possession of necromantic and prophetic powers. The marvels of Houdin in Algeria, the jugglers of India, or of the Siberian shaman muttering his incantations in his tent—in fact, of every knavish sorcerer “ who studied in a cup,” as Hood expresses it—would seem to have been prefigured under the old Druidic system. There can be no doubt that the vast majority of the superstitions in practice and belief which have descended to modern times have had their origin in those dark periods when the corruption of the Heathen world had superseded the earlier lights of the patriarchal religion, and the reign of darkness had become almost universal. The study of these fragmentary remains of primæval error would at this day possess no inconsiderable interest and value to the historian and ethnologist. Like language, they might afford beacons to indicate the “ pedigree of nations.” Thus analogies or similitudes in Ireland and India, which to the superficial might seem to possess no importance whatsoever, would to the reflective inquirer offer subjects of most interesting speculation, and become landmarks in the track of real knowledge.

In the distribution of professions amongst the Heathen hierarchy the Irish *Fear Leighis*, or “ Medicine Man,” held a very important position. On the fall of the Druidic order, the change of religion but little affected him. He retained his endowments ; the profession remained hereditary in his family ; and medical science, such as it was in the days of the last Druid, continued without change and with small improvement to be practised down to the middle of the seventeenth century by the O’Sheils, the O’Hickeys, O’Lees, O’Callinans, O’Cannovans, O’Fergususes, O’Cassidys, O’Donlevys, O’Maras, and other hereditary *olavs* of the healing art, who physicked and held their estates by long-established usage, and under the Brehon laws were entitled to sundry other emoluments, until the changes of the disastrous seventeenth century left them landless and impoverished.

Many of the medical works which emanated from this school of physic have survived the fall of their order, and are still extant in MS. They are spoken of by Edward O'Reily as “ valuable rem-

nants of ancient Irish learning, as well on account of their language and beautiful penmanship, as for the testimony which they bear of our ancient physicians being at least as learned, and having as much skill in their profession as any of their contemporary physicians in any other nation" (MS. Catalogue, in the Royal Irish Academy). This is not claiming a very immoderate distinction. The progress of medical science throughout the whole ancient world was of a very humble character. No matter how refined or civilized in other respects, ignorance, superstition, and error pervaded this department of knowledge everywhere—India, Egypt, Rome, and Ireland were alike pretty much on a par.

The whole medical system was a tissue of ignorance and charlatanism, combined with a small amount of useful knowledge of the real medicinal virtues of some plants and substances, but with a larger attribution of superstitious properties. The popular credulity as to talismans, amulets, necromancy, sorceries, fascinations, &c., was zealously encouraged by the professional orders, and has survived every change, political and religious, even to the present time, when we find it pervading the minds of the populace in rank vigour in the midst of our boasted civilization and enlightenment—not openly, it is true, but covertly, running in undercurrents through the lower strata of society; but in more ancient times all this was openly taught and encouraged. It was inculcated as truth in the schools, and proclaimed in the high places. The phylacteries of the Jews were sustained upon the authority of Scripture. Christianity itself, which had emanated out of Judaism, inherited and was infected by these superstitious tendencies. The early sect of the semi-pagan Gnostics, especially the Basilidian offshoot which so vigorously flourished in the second century, stands out remarkably in this respect. These heretics combined with the faith, as modified by them, the old Heathen belief in magic and witchcraft, and retained the worship of Serapis and other Egyptian deities, as well as that of *Abrazas*, a Syrian god, supposed the same as Mithra, or the sun (Selden, "*De Diis Syriis*," p. 44). To this name, arranged in the form of a triangle, they attributed talismanic virtues. In like manner they used amulets, of which we have a prodigious number figured in Montfaucon. These were generally of an oval form, frequently composed of black Egyptian basalt, and bore inscriptions in Coptic, Hebrew, or Greek, containing the names of Jehovah, angels, and saints, and figures of Isis, Anubis, the phallus, animals, birds, serpents, and especially the scarabæus, or beetle—a symbol of the sun and the world, as well as of generation. These were worn suspended from the neck, and were deemed preservatives against the cramp and other diseases. In the same manner was worn the *Abracadabra*, a talisman of similar character, derived from the former. The term was magical, and in its use was deemed an an-

tidote against agues, fevers, and other diseases, when written on parchment and worn about the neck.

“ *Talia languentis conducunt vincula collo,  
Lethales abigent, miranda potentia ! morbos.* ”

Of the superstitions of the Greeks and Romans, it is quite unnecessary to speak. The bulla alone represents a class of amulets as common to the latter as those of any other form were universal to the Oriental nations, the Egyptians and the western Celts and Teutons. There was no limit to the range of variety of these objects. They hung talismans about the necks of children as preservatives against envy, or the evil eye, according to Macrobius, lib. i., cap. 6. Varro tells us that they similarly suspended from the necks of boys amulets of an obscene character, as like preservatives against evil; the same practice still prevails in Southern Italy.

Medicine, in its earliest professional character, we have seen to be closely connected with religion. The most eminent and successful cultivators of the science in various countries in ancient times were raised to the rank of divinities by their grateful countrymen after their decease, as in the case of Esculapius and Chiron amongst the Greeks and Romans—the one was regarded as the son of Apollo, and the other of Saturn; and the Tuatha de Danaan, *Dian-ceacht*, was venerated as the *Dia na h-eci (Deus salutis)* of the Pagan Irish, according to the Glossarist Cormac. The practitioners combined with whatever real knowledge they possessed from training and experience a pretended correspondence with the invisible world, which produced an unlimited confidence in their superior skill and power. This faith was the more undoubted when it was most sedulously inculcated that most bodily ailments and infirmities were produced by the malevolence of demons, and their evil disposed human accomplices, and were only to be remedied by those specially privileged to commune with or control them. The Druid physician claimed this as a right from long-established prescription and hereditary succession. To him exclusively were known all the occult virtues of the whole *materia medica*; and to him belonged the carefully elaborated machinery of oracles, omens, auguries, aëromancy, fascinations, exorcisms, dream interpretations and visions, astrology, palmistry, the qualities of vegetables useful for medicinal or religious purposes—the mystic secrets of the mistletoe (all-heal), vervain, selago, and samolus; the proper times and seasons for collecting them, and all the ritual ceremonies proper to their use or application. But, mixed up with many absurdities and impositions as all this was, there still existed a large amount of really useful knowledge, and especially of the curative properties of vegetable productions. They read the book of nature with profound attention, and devoted much time to the study,

therefore, of botany as a prime necessity in their training, and the foundation of all real natural science. In modern professional education this branch of knowledge has become of very secondary importance; and the reliance upon the sanative virtues of herbs and simples has been transferred to the fairy doctor and the *pishogue* women, the last degenerate representatives of the old professors, so that the laborious teaching of former ages has become the maunding superstition of modern times. But the growth of genuine medical science, and the emancipation from the trammels of ancient error, have been a work of slow progress, and vestiges of its influence may still be traced in the empiricism of the present day. It is not alone amongst the uninstructed vulgar that we find the lingering vestiges of ancient error; for even the better educated manifest occasionally strong leanings in this direction, as we find evidenced in the encouragement given to charlatanism of every description under such titles as animal magnetism, mesmerism, biology, spirit-rapping, table turning, &c. Indeed, it is not much over a century since believers in the philosopher's stone and the transmutation of metals were found amongst men otherwise learned and sagacious, and when alchemy had its cultivators in a Boyle and a Newton, who were not above the general credulity of their age. It is not saying too much that the treatment of our old physicians was at least fully equal in value and success to that of the universally advertised and patronized pills of Professor Holloway, the Balm of Gilead, the Essence of Sambuco, Du Barry's "delicious Revalenta Arabica," or La graine de Moutard blanche de santé of M. Didier, of 32 Galerie d'Orleans, concerning which, "Plus de 200,000 cures authentiquement constatées justifient pleinement la popularité universelle." Down to the opening of the present century, faith in the *bezoar* stone as a preventive against the effect of poison, and its efficacy in various diseases, was so firm amongst medical practitioners, and it was held in such high repute, that spurious imitations of it sold at fabulous prices. It had a place amongst the most important medicines in the pharmacopœias. This was a calcareous concretion found in the stomach of animals of the goat kind, and was originally introduced into medicine by the Arabians, who pretended that it was a gum generated from the tears of stags.

To the simple-minded portion of the community the "science" of the Middle Ages would seem as much entitled to credit and confidence, as all the lofty pretensions put forth in the vast mass of professional literature which incumbers the shelves of our great public libraries. Let us not too severely condemn the popular credulity, gross as it is, which we find so prevalent, until we are enabled to offer something more reliable and trustworthy for general acceptance, seeing this avowed snail's progress which medical science has accomplished in the second moiety of the 19th century; nor

need we be much surprised that the uninstructed masses everywhere, not only in Ireland and in Asia, but even in France and Britain, still cling to ancient absurd practices and ridiculous nostrums, and attempt to justify their adherence and confidence by alleged benefit from their use.

For our present purpose it is sufficient to say, that facts establish this state of things:—The occult and supernatural virtues of plants and amulets have still a world-wide class of devout believers. We find that in India the treatment of the sick by native doctors consists chiefly in charms and superstitious observances, in addition to a few vegetable medicines. This addiction is as old as the time of Strabo, who says, (l. xv. ch. 1), the *Hylobii* (the physicians of India) apply philosophy to the study of the nature of man. “They are,” he says farther on, “able to cause persons to have a numerous offspring, and to have either male or female children, by means of charms.” In practice this very ancient people observe many customs analogous to those of Ireland, one of which is the cultivation of *snuhi* (euphorbia) on the housetop, which protects the inmates against sin and disease, just as the *Lussera an theotanc*, the house leek, secures the Irish peasant dwelling against fire and misfortune. In both France and England talismans in the nature of “Gospels” and charms have fully preserved their ancient repute. The “Gospel” charm, no doubt, had its origin amongst the Hebrews. “There was hardly,” observes Lightfoot of that nation, “a people in the whole world that more used or were more fond of amulets, charms, mutterings, exorcisms, and all kinds of enchantments.” The “Gospel,” in its present developed condition, is but a Christian modification of the original Israelitish practice. It is the adoption of sacred texts consisting of passages from the Old and New Testament, such as the commencement of the Gospel of St. John, &c., or of actual blending of magical formulæ with the sacred text. In an old Irish manuscript, hereafter to be more particularly referred to, a “charm for a sprain” is given, which may serve as a sample of this questionable species of literature:—“Christ went upon the cross; a horse’s leg was dislocated; He joined blood to blood, flesh to flesh, bone to bone; as He healed that, may He cure this. Amen.” In “Notes and Queries,” we find a French “charm” of the current time, which consists of the *Pater* and *Ave*, and is worn about the neck. It purports to cure fevers and jaundices, as well as agues. The eminently sceptical country which patronizes such productions is, as to a large portion of its population, a believer also in witchcraft. Within the present year a trial took place at the court of assize of the Maine and Loire of two *sorciers*, on a charge of attempting to poison eight persons at Villedieu, in that department, which resulted in the prisoners being found guilty. The same work just quoted (“Notes and Queries”) shows that the no less

superstitious peasantry of England carry about them, suspended from the neck, written charms sewn up in little bags. "The amount of ignorance and superstition amongst the mass of the people," says a writer in this useful periodical, "relative to supposed remedies for different diseases, is quite amazing amongst the comparatively well-informed and intelligent in many respects."

Ireland neither was, nor is she at present, more or less devoted to these superstitions than her neighbours. Ancient medical works, and modern traditional belief and practices, attest her full share in the once universal credulity. A manuscript preserved at St. Gall, which has been printed by Zeuss, and the "Mathair an Leadhdoir-eachta," herereinafter quoted, as well as many other old authorities, fully prove this. The former work contains several curious charms against strangury, headache, &c. In the incantations occur the names of Goibhnean the smith, and Diancecht the physician of the Tuatha de Danaans. The extracts hereafter given from the "Mathair" will further bear out this statement. Old English writers, from Cambrensis down to Sir J. Harington and Fynes Moryson, would, however, represent the Irish as pre-excelling in their proneness to superstition. Sir John Harington speaks of the idle faith of the Irishry in magic and witchcraft as something extraordinary; and Lady Fanshaw, a capacious believer in the supernatural herself, naïvely remarks on the superior number of ghosts in Ireland! In the period of those enlightened censors, the statute book and public records might reveal to them, could they look at home, a state of ignorance and fatuity, as regards the popular creed in magic, witchcraft, ghosts, goblins, and fairy elves, which might well challenge comparison with any other nation in the universe.

Charms, whether ancient or modern, were of every variety of material and character. They included animals, trees, shrubs, and herbs, minerals, stone, wood, glass, the human hair, jet, amber, coral, and all kinds of precious stones (the diamond and ruby excepted), such as agate, cornelian, sardonyx, amethyst, and chalcedony. To the natural properties or virtues believed to appertain to many of them was added the increased efficacy arising from preparation by astrological rule, by consecration, and the engraving of mystical figures or cabalistic, Runic, or Ogham inscriptions upon them. They were worn generally suspended on the breast, or even occasionally as earrings, and were believed to be protective of men and animals, houses and localities. They averted injury, pain, and disease; secured health and good fortune; were antidotes against evil, and misfortune, and demons; noxious animals and reptiles had no power over their wearers. Amongst the extraordinary privileges which they conferred were invincibility, invulnerability, and even invisibility.

One of these amulets, consisting of an amber bead inscribed

with a short Ogham inscription, was found a few years since in the county of Limerick, and afterwards purchased by the late Lord Londesborough. An engraving of it has been published in the “Transactions of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society,” and is a curious illustration of a class of ancient amulets very much prized. Amber, probably from its comparative rarity, was always esteemed a particularly sacred material for talismanic purposes. This precious material was regarded as the indurated faecal discharge of the spermaceti whale, and was only found floating on the surface of the sea in the Baltic, the German Ocean, and along the western shores of the Irish coast.<sup>1</sup> Formed into beads, and worn upon the person, it was regarded as imparting special protection against injury and disease. Amongst the Orientals it is carried about as the most common of all charms, especially amongst the Turks, by whom it is worn upon the forehead, and manufactured for that purpose by the Marabouts and Arab sheiks. It was in primæval ages constantly buried with the dead, and is met with commonly in barrows and other ancient graves. In the excavation of the round tower of Ardpatrick a few years since, by the South Munster Antiquarian Society, a fragment of amber of considerable size was found low down in the sepulchral chamber of that building, having been, undoubtedly, interred with the original tenant of that most ancient structure.

Similar researches in ancient tumuli have brought to light other vestiges of the superstitious credulity of the old population—rings and pendants, beads and gems of every kind, being most common amongst the funeral relics discovered, and having been interred, no doubt, as trusted protectors in life, and as reliable safeguards against the invisible enemy in death. Frequent amongst the more precious materials has been the turquoise, a highly endowed gem ; and no wonder, since, according to Fenton, an old writer of the sixteenth century :—“ It doth move when there is any peril prepared to him that weareth it.” This had also the property of removing enmities, and reconciling man and wife ; it was an unerring indication of bodily health, looking pale or bright, according as its wearer was in good condition or otherwise.

“ True as Turkoise in the dear lord’s ring  
Look well or ill.”

BEN JONSON.

Charms contained in some rings were of such sovereign efficacy, that, if the words which expressed them were pronounced in the ear of an epileptic patient, he was at once healed ; others were effective against poison.

Good, the Oxonian ex-priest, who supplied Camden with such

<sup>1</sup> Boate’s “ Natural History of Ireland,” p. 146. Pliny, l. xxxvii., s. 38.

prejudiced information concerning the Irish of his time (*temp. Eliz.*), speaking of a distemper called *Esane*, inflicted by fairies, says, that the remedy is by whispering in the sufferer's ear a short prayer, joined with a *Pater Noster*. By putting some burning coals into a cup of clear water, they are enabled, he says, "to form a better judgment of the disorder than most physicians."<sup>1</sup> The Irish at that time, according to the same authority, believed that women had charms, effectual against all complaints, divided and distributed amongst them; and to them persons applied, according to their several disorders; and they constantly began and ended the charms with a *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria*.<sup>2</sup>

It was chiefly against the malign influence of the "good people," or fairies, that the aid of spells or charms was invoked. Many of the diseases incident to men and animals were believed to be produced by these dreaded beings, for which it was essentially necessary that remedies should be provided; and the fertility of expedient of Druid and wizard, as well as of the skilful leech, was ever at hand in providing means of counteracting the baneful enmity of these powers.

For the ordinary diseases that flesh is heir to, natural remedies were abundantly at hand; but for those arising from demoniacal action supernatural means had to be employed. With these the long-transmitted traditions and experience of trained practitioners had rendered them familiar. Mysterious formularies, incantations, and charms of tried efficacy, and the occult virtues of plants and various other substances, formed a barrier against the invisible foe which all his power was not proof against. To be sure, this plenitude of endowment and knowledge was frequently as potent for evil as for good. In the hands of the malevolent it might be used mischievously; and so it happened in the instance of the birth of the renowned Cathal Crove dearg O'Connor, which was retarded like that of Hercules, and the sufferings of his mother, Gearrog ny Moran, prolonged by means of a powerful spell, consisting of an apparently harmless bundle of hazel twigs, tied with a magic string, knotted with nine knots, and suspended against the gable of the house. But for sanative purposes the influence of particular localities, the marvellous virtue of certain herbs and plants, or other productions, or even ordinary and familiar actions, applied with mystical intent, were all-sufficient to ward off evil and insure safety. Thus Lough Neagh, besides its well-known petrifying qualities, was also believed to possess healing properties,—superior, in the king's evil, even to the "royal touch." Another lake, in the county of Cork, *Lough a dereen*, in Carbery, cures by its waters the "fairy stroke or dart," as I was informed on the spot. The rites

<sup>1</sup> Gough's "Camden," iv., p. 470.

<sup>2</sup> Good in "Camden," p. 470.

here are quite similar to those observed by Captain Burns at a sacred lake in Cabul. A night spent in one of the “seven churches” at Termonbarry, near Lough Ree, was certain to cure every malady, mental or physical. Another night at Gougaun Barra, the source of the Lee, in the well-known *claish a cuinne* beside the weird old thorn tree, by a wedded pair whose union has not been blessed with issue, proves as effective in removing barrenness as did ever the prolific shadow of Rabelais’ “Abbey steeple.” Again, *Leac-na-Cineamhaine*, in *Baoi-Bearra* (Berchaven, county of Cork), is a remarkable rock, overhanging the sea at a point inaccessible. Could any one stretch himself out upon it, he is sure to obtain all his wishes ; but, unfortunately, the feat is an impossibility.

A simple preservative against witchcraft and ill luck is spittle. Pliny has recorded his testimony to its efficacy ; and pugilists at the present day spit upon their hands before commencing a fight, in hope of a favourable issue.

There is scarcely any fascination more injurious than that of the “evil eye.” It was as dreaded in ancient Rome as in modern Ireland :—

“ *Nescio quis teneros oculus mihi fascinet equos,*”

exclaims the great Latin poet ; and our remote forefathers have recorded their sense of its malignant effect in the legend of Balor of Tory Island, a glance of whose baleful eye could convert everything it looked upon into stone. Against an influence so malign, spittle afforded a certain safeguard. Thus, praising any object without accompanying the praise with a blessing was an act of *overlooking* by the evil eye ; whilst the remedy is to spit three times upon the victim, uttering at each time the necessary “*God bless it.*” But there are exceptions to this useful property of the saliva. The Four Masters relate that, in A. D. 734, Feargus Gleet, chief of Cobha, died. It appeared to him that wicked and destructive people used to cast spits in which they put charms in his face, which was the cause of his death.

The *horse shoe* has also similar protective properties. If accidentally found, it averts ill luck, and guards against evil spirits as well as witchcraft. Sailors at this day nail it to the masts of ships, and trust to it for safety from all the dangers of the sea.

But the vegetable remedies known to cunning herbalists of both sexes are perhaps the strongest and surest auxiliaries to such mystic safeguards, because “the good people” are powerless against them, when used by skilful operators. Many of these highly endowed productions of nature are not always of easy attainment, or to be obtained without great risk. The fairies do not unresistingly resign their power into mortal hands, to be used against themselves. Accordingly, they jealously watch over and guard these treasures, and

rigorously punish those who would lay unhallowed hands upon them. Thus the mandragora, or mandrake, must be drawn from the earth in which it has its growth by means of a dog. The juice of this vegetable was in high repute, as being believed to excite amorous inclinations, and was used for love potions or philtres, at least in the East. The Irish notion of its origin is, that it is to be found under a gallows, and is produced from the drops which fall from it on the earth. Its roots are supposed to resemble the human form. Placed under the head of a patient, it excites sleep. That very quaint and amusing old botanist, Caleb Threlkeld, in his "Synopsis Stirpium Hibernicarum," tells us, that another plant, the equisetum, or "horse tail," must be pulled with prayer, lest the fairies run away with the sorceress, which is, he gravely assures us, an abuse of God's holy ordinance of prayer. In the Irish manuscript work entitled "*Mathair an Leadhdoireachta*," the mother of healing, said to have been compiled at Salamanca, by Thaddeus O'Cuinn, in 1139, there are various herbs mentioned which protect those who possess them against fairy aggression. To remove these from their place of growth, as in the case of the equisetum just mentioned, is highly perilous, inasmuch as the invisible powers who guard them resent the act as a sacrilege against themselves. For the extraction of one of these from the earth with safety, such as the *Trein luibh* (herb of power), a particular recipe is given. The least dangerous way, it informs us, to accomplish this is by the top. For this purpose a cat or dog must be got: a strong thread is tied to the animal's leg, and about the stump of the plant, and by this means only should it be removed, for mortals are prohibited from otherwise attempting it. Many are the virtues of this herb, "and having it about the person is a protection against disease." Even amongst the ancient Romans it was deemed prudent that some herbs, when gathered for necromantic purposes, should be drawn up by the roots, as in the case wherein Horace (Epod. 5), describes Canidia requiring for her unholy purpose that the wild fig tree should be pulled up from the earth.

In India some medicinal plants are also supposed to be under the guardianship of demons. They should be gathered at prescribed periods, and the act accompanied with certain prayers. "Before a medicinal plant is collected in the morning," writes Dr. Wise, in his "Commentary on the Hindu System of Medicine" (p. 116), "a prayer should be said by the person, with his face to the north. The following is such a prayer, which is supposed to remove any devils which may be hiding near: 'O God, if any devil be lurking here, begone, whether it be vital, Peshaca, Rakshas, or Shri sarpa' (the devil of serpents). As the shrub is being gathered, the person should say, 'O shrub! as Bramha, Indra, and Vishnu plucked

you, for the same reason I now remove you." In illustration of this curious superstition in Ireland, a friend informs me, that a farmer neighbouring to his residence having occasion to possess himself of the "Trein luibh," got a large dog, and, tying a string to the herb and the leg of a dog, he in that manner drew up the herb, whereby a person afflicted with falling sickness was cured; but the poor dog on the following day was attacked with convulsions. The animal was thereupon hanged, and left for dead; but, strange to relate, on the next day he stood alive at his master's door. In the course of a few hours, however, the dog was again attacked, and again hanged and left for dead; but he once more recovered. Again, on the morning following his second execution, he was once more found alive, but, relapsing in the course of the day, a wise neighbour advised that the animal should be allowed to get out of his fit, and then put to death; this advice was approved of and acted on, and this time the operation was found effective.

Amongst other sanative virtues of a supernatural description attached to herbs may be noticed, from the same instructive manuscript, that attributed to the columbine, which, if carried about the person, or being rubbed with it, serpents or mad dogs can do the bearer no injury. Another plant, the *lussera an sparain* (*Bursa pastoris*), being put under the necks of sheep, *wolves will not see them*. This herb must be akin to the fern (*Filix minor longifolia*), whose seed, according to Shakspeare, had the secret of invisibility for the human *sheep*. Threlkeld adverts to the same important and desirable gift:—"A great splutter," he says, "has been made about fern seed, and several sauntering stories feigned concerning its collection on St. John's eve, or the summer solstice, which are mere trumpery."

Ladies bathing themselves in a decoction of the *Turcan* (*Cardionis benedictus*) shall only bear sons! This superstition is germane to that of the ancient Hindoos already noticed, on the authority of Strabo. Another species of bath is reported in the "Agallamh na seanorridhe," which had the virtue of reviving the vanished love of their husbands, two sons of an ancient king of Fermoy, to their unfortunate wives, about to be divorced by them. Caoilte, upon a promise of reward, undertook to restore the love of the two inconstant husbands to the sorrowing ladies. He gathered for the purpose the full of his right hand of various fairy herbs (*losaibh sidhe*) which the Fenian ladies were accustomed to use. On these he caused a bath to be made, in which the slighted fair ones bathed, and thereby was restored to them the love of their fickle spouses. The Irish, in truth, were never wanting, and indeed what nation in the world ever was, in the invention of love philtres and stimu-

lants. Shakspeare alludes to a pansy called "love in idleness," of which he says—

— "the juice on sleeping eyelids laid  
Will make a man or woman *madly dote*  
Upon the next live creature that it sees."

*Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act ii., Sc. 2.

The *fairy stroke*—whether known as the *Millteoracht*, when resulting in abscess, or in epilepsy, a disease always supposed to originate from the fairies—has a variety of remedies applied to it, the laurel amongst others; but the digitalis—Irish, *Meracan na sith*, or fairy thimble—is regarded as the principal. Its utility is greatest where this infliction is productive of disease of the bones, &c. The *Scamp Crainn* (*polypodium*) or polypody of the oak, infused in water, was also considered beneficial.

The "Fugo demonium" (*Bith Nuadh*, or new life), is so called because it banishes demons from the persons of those who carry it about them; and he who has it in his hand will have the gift of eloquence, which places it in rivalry with the Blarney stone!

The yarrow, or milfoil (*Aithir Talmhain*) has a kindred but more limited faculty of endowing with this coveted eloquence. Placed under the foot in shoes, it also imparts fluency of speech, but only for a single day.

The child who wears the *Cruach Padruig* (*Barba silicana*, or plantain) on his neck, is insured full protection thereby, and shall not suffer hurt or injury from the fairies.

Threlkeld, himself no believer in the superstitious virtues of plants, nevertheless notices the popular credulity in his time regarding some of them. Of the antirrhinum, or snapdragon, the Irish *Sriumh na Laogh*, he says:—

"There are many frivolous superstitious fables which are reported of the power of this plant, and some others, against spectres, charms, and witchcraft. The only true remedy against such abominations as spring from observers of times, enchanters, witches, charmers, consulters with familiar spirits, wizards, and necromancers, is to hearken to that prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ, before whose faithful ministers Satan falleth as lightening from heaven."

Again, of the hazel (Irish, *Coll*), he observes:—

"That a divining rod of this wood should be used to find out metals, is owing to the impostures of Satan, whose design is to abuse the creatures with vain amusements under the old colour of knowledge more than is fit for man."

This wand is still believed to possess the power of indicating hidden treasures. It turns, in obedience to an extraordinary instinct, in the presence of such treasures, or of water.

The rowan, or mountain ash tree, was always regarded as a repellent of serpents and evil spirits, and as averting fascination ; for this purpose, in common with other trees and shrubs, such as the laurel, &c., it was planted around dwellings. Some of its fabled virtues are given in the tale of "Diarmuid and Graine," page 119, where the eating of three of its berries preserves from all disease ; and those thus feeding feel from it the exhilaration of wine and the solace imparted by old mead, and, however aged, would become rejuvenescent—the centenarian would again resume the prime of manhood. A "Druidical ordeal" was undergone by a female suspected, as mentioned in the Brehon laws, by her rubbing her tongue to a bronze adze heated or reddened in a fire made either of the rowan tree or of the blackthorn.<sup>1</sup> Crosses formed of mountain ash twigs are still placed over the doors of the houses of the peasantry, by attaching them to the thatch, as a protection against witchcraft, evil spirits, and fairies, not only in Ireland, but in Scotland. The fairy thorn, on the other hand, was sacred to those supernatural beings, and was consequently held in dread veneration. It was specially prohibited to men and animals to profane or injure it.

To the willow a singular property belonged. Whilst with us, moderns, it is associated with sorrow and mourning, it was believed of old to inspire an uncontrollable inclination to practise on "the light fantastic toe." The recipe to produce this agreeable effect was as follows :—Take a willow rod, pared to a quadrangular figure, and write upon it the words, "sator, arepo, tenet, opera, rotas;" place this over the lintel of a door, and it will cause all the inmates incontinently to dance. In another case, a sprig of the *Attin Muirre* (furze, or gorse), carried in the button hole of a garment, secures the wayfarer against straying on mountain or moorland.

But, of all the surpassingly distinguished, prized, and endowed materials appropriated to the uses of ancient superstitious medicament, crystal and glass were pre-eminent. Rounded crystals and glass beads occur amongst the most frequent forms of amulets found either in common use or in ancient sepulchres. Of the latter material was the universally celebrated *Ovum anguinum*—*Gleiniaw Nadred* (Welsh), *Gloine Nathrach* (Gaelic)—adder stone, or serpent's egg of Celtic archaeology. Davis<sup>2</sup> calls it "the splendid product of the adder," shot forth by serpents ; and the learned Jacob Bryant<sup>3</sup> regarded it as an emblem of the ark, and informs us that it was held in equal repute by Persians, Syrians, and Celts. Of its production by serpents, Pliny in his "Natural History" (xxix., c. 3), has left us a marvellous account, sufficiently well known to the general reader. Indeed, few products appertaining to an-

<sup>1</sup> "Catalogue of Antiquities, Royal Irish Academy," p. 523.

<sup>2</sup> "Mythology," p. 577.

<sup>3</sup> "Analysis," vol. ii., p. 319.

cient Druidism have obtained a notoriety more remarkable than this wonder-working crystal. Its fortunate possessor was believed by its means to obtain the superiority over his adversary in every kind of contest, whilst it was also gifted to obtain for him the friendship of eminent men. In Scotland the adder stone was believed to be good for sick women in their travail, and “until lately” was used for alleviating the pains of parturition. It was for such purpose placed under the bolster in the bed, or tied about the knee of the patient.

A gifted stone of this genus is spoken of by Martin, in his account of the Hebrides, where he relates that a globular stone, about the bigness of a goose egg, was preserved in the island of Arran. This, he says, was in former times thrown amongst the enemy in battle, and gave victory to the Mac Donalds of the Isles, its owners. In Martin’s own times its virtue was to remove stitches from the sides of sick persons by laying it close to the place affected ; and if the patient does not outlive the distemper, they say the stone removes out of the bed of its own accord, and *è contra*. The natives use this stone for swearing oaths upon it (Martin’s “Western Islands,” p. 225).

Another stone of the same class, but of an annular form, was exhibited at the meeting of the Archæological Institute in Edinburgh, in 1856. “It had been strung along with a seal of fine topaz on the skin of a snake, and was highly prized by the family of the lady to whom it belonged ; and it had been resorted to, even in recent times, for the cure of the diseases of children.”

A writer cited by Higgins, in his “Celtic Druids,” p. 290, says that, in Cornwall, “Beasts bit and envenomed, being given some water to drink wherein this stone had been infused, will perfectly recover of the poison.”

Water thus consecrated by the immersion of sacred relics or other objects retained, in the popular estimation, its supposed efficacy in Christian times as fully as it did in Pagan ages. The Venerable Bede<sup>1</sup> instances this amongst his Saxon countrymen of his own period. A portion of a cross, erected by King Oswald previous to a battle<sup>2</sup> being, as he tells us, immersed in water, restores ailing men or cattle to health. A like virtue was supposed to reside in Irish MSS., scrapings of which, being put into water, and this given to drink, have expelled poison. Coins, even, thus immersed had the like remedial effect. The cow doctor, amongst his large store of recipes, according to Cæsar Otway,<sup>3</sup> produces a drink made on certain herbs in which *three halfpence* had been boiled ; and we have lately read in the “Northern Ensign,” a Highland newspaper, that a cow having become diseased by the *overlooking* of an *evil eye*, its

<sup>1</sup> “Ecclesiastical History,” iii., c. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* l. i.

<sup>3</sup> “Erris,” p. 381.

owner borrowed two gold rings and a few pieces of silver from a neighbour, and deposited them in a dish of water. The liquid thus medicated being given to the animal to drink, accompanied by a few mystic words, the cow quickly recovered.

Clearly in the same category with these instances, and with the *Ovum anguinum*, must be placed the various amulets (two of them in the figure of the *Connoch*), represented in our engraving. These articles being immersed in water, which is afterwards given to be drunk by cattle supposed to be attacked by the murrain, extraordinary cures are believed to be effected by the liquid.

Why the form of the animal which is supposed to have produced the distemper was selected as the means of procuring a recovery, it is difficult to tell; but the idea has the sanction of classical antiquity in its favour, as Horace, *Epod. xvii.*, alludes to the superstitious belief that the same weapon which inflicted the wound could only heal it, as was the case of Telephus, wounded by Achilles, who could, according to the oracle, be only cured by the weapon of Achilles.

On the same principle it was believed that the toad carried in its head an antidote against its own poison, to which Shakspeare, in “As you like it,” advertises:—

“Sweet are the uses of adversity ;  
Which, like the toad ugly and venomous,  
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.”

It was, no doubt, the popular belief that the same baneful influence, or its effigies, which produced the malady, carried with it the remedy against its own virulence. In the same spirit we learn that the talisman of the Eastern necromancers used for the recovery of concealed treasures from the power of the genii who guard them at the bottom of wells, &c., consists, amongst various other symbols, of the figure of a man drawing up with a cord a bucket from the bottom of a fountain. See Lindsay’s “Observations on an Ancient Talisman.”

Cattle formed the principal portion of ancient wealth. They were the medium of barter, the means of discharging tributes and stipends; gifts were valued by cattle, they formed to some considerable extent the representative of a currency, and were the objects and prizes of war and endless forays and strife—the reward of enterprise, courage, and daring. They were not only the objects of desire to man, but also to the “good people;” therefore, in the latter case, the aid of religion was invoked for their protection. Cows, when fairy struck, yield no butter, or they sicken and die. But then there are mystic means within the reach of mankind to counteract such injury, such as placing the plough coulter in the fire, during the process of

churning, which restores the butter. On May eve the herds and flocks are peculiarly subject to these sinister influences ; then the elfin arrow, the fairy blast, and all kinds of *diablerie*, and the machinations of witches and wizards, are particularly to be dreaded ; cattle then have to be housed and looked after, otherwise their owners would have cause to bewail any negligence or omission of necessary precautions. The decoction of simples gathered on May day, such as the “herb of seven cures,” the yarrow, speedwell, &c., and the plentiful application and use of the *Caorthin*, or rowan tree, were then brought into requisition. For the murrain, which is a plague emanating from fairy influence, the remedy is quite as simple when attainable. Ostensibly the disorder proceeds from the *Connoch*, or caterpillar, swallowed by the animal, and producing internal disease, very frequently of a fatal character. A plentiful potation of water, in which the powerful amulet called the “murrain stone,” has been immersed, generally proves a sovereign remedy for this complaint. Unfortunately, this powerful panacea is not frequently to be obtained. Few are those fortunate enough to possess it ; and such families as have received it by inheritance value it so highly, that they lend it out but rarely, and as a favour almost beyond price. A large globular crystal, hooped with silver, has been and is an heirloom in the family of the Marquis of Waterford. When lent as a great favour, it is placed in a running stream, and the murrain-infected cattle drink lower down. We saw it in the Antiquities' Court of the first Dublin Exhibition. When an amulet of this kind is lent, the borrower is bound by bonds and solemn obligations for its speedy and safe return ; where default has been made in keeping faith with the owner, such breaches have become the subject of suits at law.

The figure of one of the *Connochs*, or murrain caterpillars,<sup>1</sup> depicted in the accompanying plate, figs., 1 and 5, is now the property of John Lindsay, Esq., of Maryville, near Cork, the well-known author of so many valuable numismatic works. This relic was found in the ancient cemetery of Timoleague Abbey, in or about the year 1843. It is formed of silver, in which is imbedded a series of crystals, amber-coloured and azure, and is about three inches in length.

The second of these curious articles is very similar to the former in figure, size, and material. This was obtained near Doneraile, in the same county, in 1834, by the late Redmond Anthony, Esq., of Piltown, in the county of Kilkenny, whose rich museum of antiquities was dispersed by auction at London, after his lamented death some years since.

An amulet of different form, but of similar virtues, and much celebrated for its important cures in the relief of cattle, was long

<sup>1</sup> This much-prized remedy is various in its material and form.

held as an heirloom in the family of the late Richard Fitzgerald, of Castle Richard, the lineal descendant of that branch of the historical Geraldines bearing the hereditary title of "Seneschals of Imokilly." It was of an oval form, crystal in material, and set in silver. The manner of its use was, like that of the "connoch," by immersion in water, the liquid being thereby supposed to partake of its sanative properties, and to serve as an unfailing medicine to the diseased animal.

The still more ancient family of the MacCarthys of "the Glen,"<sup>1</sup> a branch of the princely house of Muskerry, Lords of Blarney, long established in Donoughmore, near that famed castle and district, were the owners of another oval crystal amulet, set also in silver, which was believed to be eminently endowed with healing properties. Even at this day it is frequently lent out for use to farmers in the vicinity of Cork, whose cattle are infected by murrain, and it is said with the happiest result. It is but a very few years since its possession became the subject of a lawsuit between its aggrieved and too confiding owner and a dishonest borrower to whom it had been lent, and who endeavoured to retain it despite of very solemn engagements to return it after it had been used. The court proceedings in this case were duly reported in the newspapers of the day. An engraving of this coveted gem accompanies the present paper. See Plate, fig. 4.

The fourth amulet depicted in our Plate (figs. 2 and 3) of amulets is the "jewel," so called, as shall be presently shown, now the property of a gentleman of the name of Morgan, a resident also in the neighbourhood of Cork. Under the name of the "blood stone," it has been for a long time preserved as an heirloom in his family, and held in high estimation for its presumed medicinal value. It is traditionally believed to have been brought to Ireland from some foreign land by a former member of the family, who had been in his early years a great traveller; but it is presumed that a curious entry in the Common Council Book of Cork throws some more certain light upon its history. It is stated to have been efficacious in stopping the effusion of blood, by suspending it round the neck of the person affected. The stones forming the setting round the central crystal are also reputed to possess healing virtues distinct from the great crystal, but all applicable to the cure of cattle or of haemorrhage. Some of these stones have been lost in consequence of lending it amongst the neighbouring farmers from time to time, when their cattle became distempered, the virtues attributed to them forming a temptation too strong for their virtue or honesty. The amulet consists of a plate of gilt silver, the back elaborately chased; the marginal orna-

<sup>1</sup> Now represented by John MacCarthy Millstreet.  
O'Leary, Esq., of Coomlegane, near

mental projections, together with the suspending link, were set with seven amethysts, one of which has been abstracted. The “blood stone” forms the great opaque-coloured crystal in the centre.

The entry in the Council Book to which I have already alluded, and for which I am indebted to R. Caulfield, Esq., a gentleman well known for his research and knowledge of our local antiquities, seems unequivocally to relate to this curious talisman. There is nothing at all improbable in the idea of a public body like the old corporation of Cork, in a period so remote as that of the reign of the British Solomon, James I., holding, for the assumed general benefit of a credulous community, a “jewel” of the valuable qualities attributed to this. The necessities of the council no doubt rendered the placing of it out in pawn compulsory; but it would seem that the act was accompanied with a prudent condition, that it should from time to time be forthcoming for inspection, to insure its safe keeping. This condition, we may infer from the record, was violated by Mr. Pownch, the mortgagee, who having made default in its production, the mortgaging body were compelled to have its value appraised; and it is probable that the jewel never afterwards found its way back to the corporate treasury. The “jewel” seems to have had no specific name by which it was known, hence the blank left in its description, which in other respects was also defective. The mention of a darkish stone in the midst thereof seems to refer to the opaque colour of the central crystal.

“*November 25, 1618.—JEWEL.*

“Memorandum, that Adam Goold produce in court three several mondais a silver . . . in the middest thereof there was a darkish stone of . . . sett and ymbrodered about with redd stones, four of them . . . square, and . . . four square [which] was pawned unto him above a year and a daie past by one David Pownch fitz Patrick for 40s. sterl., and for that the said David app<sup>d</sup> not, being solemplie called uppon in courte three several mondais the prasm<sup>t</sup> of the said jewill was by the courte referred to Morice Goold fitz John, Merchant, and Richard Goold, who have retourned the daie and year afforesaid that the said jewill is worth 30s. st<sup>s</sup>.”

A case which created much amusement, and one that was listened to with deep interest by a large number of the lower class, came on for investigation at the Police Office, Cork, on Thursday, April 15, 1840, before Alderman Saunders, on a summons to show cause why a felony information should not be taken against a man named Cornelius Sheehan, for unlawfully possessing himself of, and detaining, a murrain stone, the property of a Mrs. M'Auliffe, otherwise Meares, residing on Kyrl's-quay.

“The party complained against was called, but did not appear.

“Mrs. M'Auliffe, being sworn, stated her complaint, with an air of

dignity peculiar to herself; she said :—‘Please your Honor, I am the true descendant of Donald Mac Fineen M’Carthy Reagh, who was Earl of Kildare, and Lord Leftunant av Ireland in 1496 ; and, if you will please, I will give you my genallogy.’

“Mr. O’Brien.—‘We admit the fact; there is no necessity for going through the list of your noble ancestors; your appearance is evidence of the fact’ (laughter).

“Mrs. M’Auliffe.—‘Be it known to you, then, that my ancestor, Mac Carty More, King of Cork 800 years ago, was out hunting one day, when one of the good people gave him a sthone, which had the vartue of curing cattle when they were sick.’

“Mr. O’Brien.—‘How was it used ? This is very important to agriculturists.’

“Mrs. M’Auliffe.—‘Jist make de sign of de cross by rubbing it on the back of the baste; do that three times three mornings fasting, and the cratur is well.’

“Mr. O’Brien.—‘What kind of a stone was it ?’

“Mrs. M’Auliffe.—‘A weeny sthone, which was kept in an ancient silver box, so that the daylight couldn’t see it.’

“Mr. O’Brien.—‘Well, what has become of it ?’

“Mrs. M’Auliffe.—‘Why, a friend of mine in de country had his cattle sick, and larning through a gossip that I had de sthone, he came and borrowed it of me.’

“Mr. O’Brien.—‘You gave it to him?’

“Mrs. M’Auliffe.—‘Of coarse; I darn’t refuse it when he spake the word.’

“Mr. O’Brien.—‘A charmed word, I suppose ?’

“Mrs. M’Auliffe.—‘You musn’t hear it—you hav’n’t de fait (laughter).’

“Mr. O’Brien.—‘Of course not. Well, did he rub it to the cattle ?’

“Mrs. M’Auliffe.—‘To be sure he did.’

“Mr. O’Brien.—‘And they are all well ?’

“Mrs. M’Auliffe.—‘By coarse.’

“Mr. O’Brien.—‘Did you ever see the stone since ?’

“Mrs. M’Auliffe.—‘Never.’

“Mr. O’Brien.—‘What became of it ?’

“Mrs. M’Auliffe.—‘When the miracle was worked he sent home de sthone; but the garsoon mistook de house, and gave it to Con Sheehan.’

“Mr. O’Brien.—‘And Con refused to return it ?’

“Mrs. M’Auliffe.—‘He gives no sattysfaction at all.’

“Mr. O’Brien.—‘Have you anything more to say, Ma’am ?’

“Mrs. M’Auliffe.—‘I say this—if he don’t send it home to me, he and all belonging to him will taw like ice.’

“Mr. O’Brien.—‘That is our case, your Worship.’

“The Bench declared it had no jurisdiction in the case.

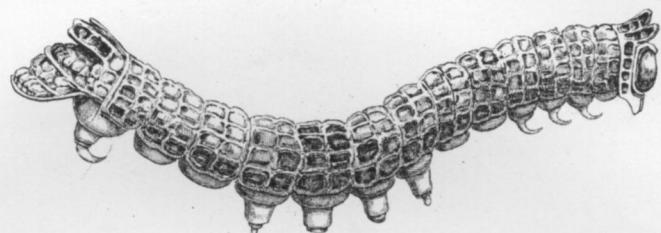


Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.

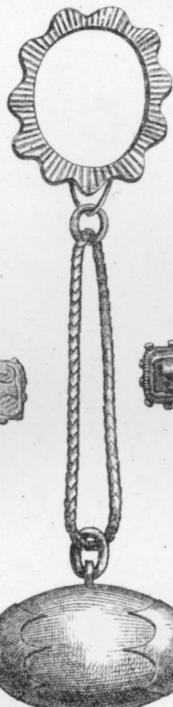


Fig. 4.



Fig. 3.

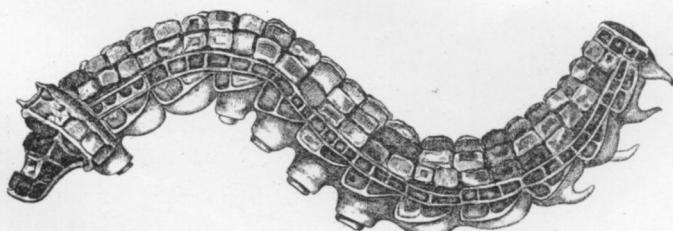


Fig. 5.

IRISH MEDICAL AMULETS.

Moore Lith. Cork.